

City of Fremantle—response to question on notice

‘From your point of view, as a relatively small local government, what institutions, at a national level, could assist you in realising your vision for the community?’ (Hansard transcript page 15).

The City of Fremantle's response:

The reinstatement of the Major Cities Unit, or creation of a new institution with a similar mandate and focus, would be highly beneficial. Advice provided by the former Major Cities Unit (MCU) informed development of planning policy to guide the management of population and physical growth, change and urbanisation at a state and local level. Support provided by the MCU or similar body which can monitor established and emerging trends at a national level and provide advice on how these can be applied in developing urban policy at a more local level is a valuable tool in helping city local governments prepare for the future. The *State of Australian Cities* reports produced by the former MCU were a pulse check on the trends and growth patterns in our major cities, and work was also done on gaining a better understanding of the roles cities have on other areas such as workforce participation and productivity, innovation and climate change adaptation. Understanding and planning for the issues at a local government level is critical if city local governments such as Fremantle are to be able to take steps to ensure that their cities are more sustainable, liveable and productive.

Working with Infrastructure Australia, the former MCU enjoyed a mandate to work across portfolios and with all spheres of government, the private sector and the community to provide the data needed to help transform our cities.

A second key area where a national level institution could assist the City of Fremantle, and no doubt other local governments, is in relation to a coordinated approach to affordable housing provision. Whilst traditional social housing for rent is recognised as a state level responsibility, there is a role for a body that can lead horizontal (across all parts of government, the private sector and community/non-for profit sector) and vertical (alignment between national, state and local government) integration of work on other mechanisms to deliver a greater supply of housing for people whose income levels do not permit them to buy or rent at market costs, or who are placed under acute financial stress in terms of meeting living costs other than housing if they do buy or rent in the open market. The scope of such a body could include a role in examining the potential release of vacant or underutilised Commonwealth land and property assets for affordable housing projects, possibly through public-private partnership arrangements with the development industry. Examples of institutions or agencies with similar remits exist elsewhere in the world. Examples worthy of investigation include the Vancouver Affordable Housing Authority in British Columbia, Canada, and the Homes for Londoners Board in the United Kingdom.